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▲ Business Work & Save Section front page feature, September 29, 2004

Companies help commuters



SCOTT ANDERSON / COURIER-POST FILE

▲ Traffic jams up on Admiral Wilson Boulevard in Pennsauken in October. Leading companies whose programs ease employees' daily commute are honored in the Environmental Protection Agency's 'Best Workplaces for Commuters' list.

EPA honoring 69 firms for incentives

By Cynthia R. Nelson
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The federal government will release a list today lauding companies that make a major effort to ease their employees' commutes, which helps ease traffic congestion and air pollution.

High-tech giant Intel is No. 1 on the list of 69 Fortune 500 companies to be designated as "Best Workplaces for Commuters" by the Environmental Protection Agency, which compiled the list. Locally, Wyeth, with,

multiple locations around New Jersey and Pennsylvania, ranked 17.

The EPA rated the companies by how many employees are offered incentives not to drive alone to work. Incentives included the chance to work from home and financial subsidies for using public transit. Companies also had to make sure employees had a ride home in an emergency.

A place on the list gives companies bragging rights and a chance to use the program's logo for recruiting. Some companies use the slogan in help-wanted ads, and some have seen a decline in staff turnover.

Many of the companies on the list have long offered generous benefits to make commuting easier. Others, such as Wyeth, expanded their commuting benefits when the EPA announced the program in the spring.

The pharmaceutical giant launched in 2001 a Commuter Assistance Center at its offices in Collegeville and Great Valley, Pa. The centers coordinate transportation and commuter programs for more than 4,000 employees.

According to the company, its programs have continued to reduce road congestion and vehicle turnover.

emissions by providing Wyeth employees with alternative ways of commuting to work. Other Wyeth sites offer benefits such as a car pool program with preferred parking, a shuttle service to and from public transportation and on-site facilities to accommodate bicycle and walking commuters (e.g., shower, cafeteria and dry cleaning services) as well as supplying an emergency ride home if needed.

But workers who carpool or take a bus are rare. More than 75 percent of U.S. workers get to work by driving alone, compared with 64 percent in 1980. Average delays per driver in the 85 biggest U.S. cities have risen to 46 hours a year in 2002 from 16 hours in 1982, according to the Texas Transportation Institute.

The EPA calculates that the benefits offered by the companies on the list save 450 million miles of driving a year. The companies' programs also prevent the release of 186,000 tons of the main gas linked to global warming, which is equivalent to emissions from about 41,000 cars a year.

Transportation experts say the program will help change workers' attitudes about how to get to work.

Wyeth said they have not polled their workers about the programs. But Doug Petkus, a Medford resident who works at Wyeth's Collegeville office, believes the commuter program is a valuable asset. "The employees who participate in the program appreciate them," he said, noting there are numerous Camden County residents who take advantage of a van commuting service the

company offers. "Commuting in that manner, with colleagues, is a great alternative to fighting traffic on the Schuylkill Expressway, plus they can leave at times that are a little ahead of normal commuting times.'

Aside from Wyeth being socially and environmentally conscious, employees "can plan the personal aspects of their life around the commute. The balance between work and family life is important to us.'

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